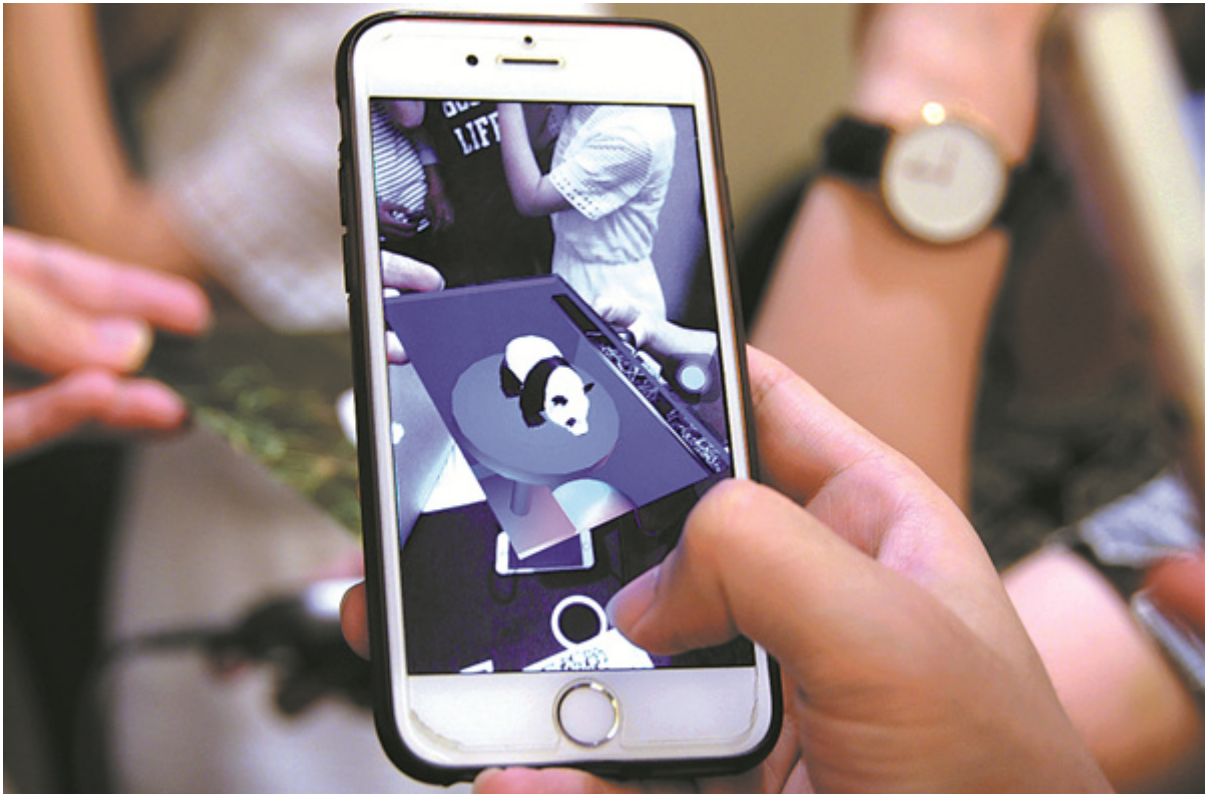


VR panda 'paradise' coming to Chengdu



A Beijing firm that will provide VR technology for a new panda attraction also makes a panda app. [Photo/China Daily]

Giant panda fan Wan Yongqing will come close to fulfilling a long-held dream when the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Sichuan Province completes its latest attraction – a virtual reality “panda paradise”.

Wan wants to touch a panda, but since that’s prohibited, he’ll settle for the next-best thing, a fur-covered replica panda that looks like the real thing through a VR headset.

“Thanks to the construction of a virtual reality panda-themed paradise, visitors will be able to experience something very much like feeling a real panda,” said Wan, a photographer from Beijing.

Wan, a dedicated panda enthusiast, has visited Sichuan many times since 2012 to take photos of the animals.

“I have been to the Chengdu panda base and the Dujiangyan base, as well as to the three bases of the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda. But I have never had the privilege of feeling a panda,” he said.

The Chengdu center is preparing to turn the first and second floors of its museum into the VR panda-themed attraction. It is expected to open next year.

The center will work with a high-tech firm in Beijing to provide the VR technology for the experience, according to Chen Cheng, information officer at the center.

“In the paradise there will be pictures of different pandas and bamboo forests. When visitors put on VR eyeglasses, it will all seem real. Pandas will stand up, sit down, eat bamboo or wander in the forests. People will be able to feel and hold the virtual pandas as they would in real life,” she said.

The Chengdu panda center was set up in 1987 with six hungry, sick pandas rescued from different parts of Sichuan after their primary food source – bamboo – dwindled.

It used to be difficult for captive pandas to breed or for their cubs to survive. Thanks to Chinese researchers’ painstaking efforts, those problems were solved.

As of the end of last year, the Chengdu base was home to 175 captive pandas, according to the latest counts.

The base has loaned pandas to zoos in Japan, Spain, France, Germany, the United States and Canada for joint research and breeding programs.

According to Chen, there are plans to build more VR panda-themed attractions at zoos in the six countries.